

Written Testimony of Lisa P. Sementilli, Deputy Director

Before the Public Health Committee

March 15, 2013

In Support of: SB 896 A Homeless Person's Bill of Rights

Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson and members of the Public Health Committee. Thank you for hearing my testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH), and thank you for your consideration of matters of importance to individuals experiencing homelessness.

Connecticut's emergency shelters have run at or over 100% of their legal capacity for more than two years. More than 16,000 persons (and this includes children) used our emergency and transitional housing programs last year. Our data show that far more families and individuals experience housing instability and homelessness at any one time than can be served by our fragile prevention and crisis response system -- *an estimated 40,000 families are "doubled up" (staying with family or friend for economic reasons) in Connecticut.*

CCEH supports SB 896 and believes all people experiencing homelessness should be treated with dignity and respect. Equal opportunity for all under the law is a central tenet of our democracy. Access to public resources and connection to community is a critical piece of getting out of homelessness and trauma is too common an experience for those without a safe place to call home. Public parks, transportation and buildings belong to all of us and should be free from harassment or intimidation from law enforcement officers for all our citizens.

SB 896 also supports the rights of homeless persons to have equal opportunity in employment. Economic opportunity in Connecticut continues to be limited, especially for those with barriers such as disabling health conditions, unstable housing, limited education, or a history of trauma or violence that many homeless persons experience. We urge your support for expansions of job training and education programs to advance employment and earnings for the most marginalized residents.

CCEH espouses a "housing first" philosophy and approach to ending homelessness. This means that housing should not be used as a reward for compliance with treatment plans, employment success or "good" aka docile behavior or sobriety. Instead, stable housing is the pathway to a more stable life, better employment and earnings, better compliance with behavioral health treatment, participation in income support programs.

We urge you to not only focus on a bill of rights, but on housing-based solutions to end homelessness. While economic security for all our residents remains elusive, the good news is that we have the tools to end homelessness, and urge you to support several of the provisions in the Governor's budget.

In particular, we urge your support for **rapid re-housing**. Governor Malloy's proposal includes an on-going commitment to rapid re-housing. It adds \$500,000 (\$250,000 each year) for housing relocation and stabilization services and short-term financial assistance to help homeless families move as quickly as possible into permanent housing and achieve stability. CCEH views the rapid re-housing investment as a down payment on ending family homelessness in Connecticut. Rapid Re-Housing is a set of interconnected strategies:

1. Coordinated intake, screening and housing-based assessment
2. Housing search, landlord recruitment, and relocation assistance.
3. Housing stabilization supports, linkages to community services
4. Timed limited financial assistance (for up to 12 months). This may include transportation for housing search, first/last month's rent, security deposit, application fees, moving costs, utility connection fees and arrearages, and other costs depending on the needs of the family. Rental assistance structured as a shallow flat subsidy based on unit size and adjusted for each region.

Last biennium, Governor Malloy initiated a significant investment in affordable housing in Connecticut included \$120 million for affordable housing; \$30 million to preserve and upgrade public housing as the start of a ten year commitment; and over \$30 million for 300 units of supportive housing. The biennial budget also provides:

- **Supportive Housing.** The proposed budget also adds \$20 million in funding for 100 units of supportive housing, with an annualized \$1 million for rental assistance subsidies and \$1 million for services. There are approximately 2,500 chronically homeless individuals in Connecticut.
- **Affordable Housing.** Authorizes \$68 million in capital funding in each year of the biennium to create new affordable housing options for workers, youth and families.
- **Public Housing Revitalization.** Authorizes \$60 million in bonding (\$30 million in each year). Funding is supported with an annualized \$3 million for 300 new rental assistance vouchers.

We urge your support for civil rights measures as well as rapid, supportive and affordable housing. Thank you.